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Global Overpopulation

In the face of overwhelming evidence that there is no way of fighting poverty in the Third World without more extensive family planning, the Reagan administration is cutting back its support of the most tested and experienced organizations in this field, condemning wide areas of the globe to ever bigger, ever more hungry populations.

Knowledgeable congressmen such as Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.) suggest that the administration's penny-pinching will have the counterproductive result of accelerating illegal abortions in the less developed countries—just what the White House presumably wants to avoid.

In a new book, "State of the World, 1985," Lester Brown and his Worldwatch Associates say the alternative to checking population by famine—the present case in Ethiopia—may be a one-child-per-family policy in 20 countries from Mexico to the Philippines if the birth control brakes aren't applied in other ways.

The ravages of famine aren't going to change until the affected countries are able to produce more of their own food. And even that can't happen until the United States joins in helping these countries to establish effective birth control programs.

Instead, the Reagan administration has cut off $17 million for the International Planned Parenthood Federation, because the IPPF allocates a dribble of funds—less than one-half percent of the money it gets from non-American sources—to clinics providing abortion services where they are legal in their own countries.

In addition, reacting to stories of infanticide and forced abortion in China published last month by The Washington Post, the administration has at least temporarily frozen $46 million for the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, even though none of this money was destined for China.

Agency for International Development Administrator M. Peter McPherson is being pressured by Sens. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Gordon J. Humphrey (R-N.H.) to supply "detailed proof" that U.S. funds are not assisting Chinese population-control efforts, directly or indirectly.

Yet another blow to the financing of population control efforts came in the new budget for fiscal 1986, which cuts the AID's Family Assistance Planning funds to $250 million from $290 million in fiscal 1985.

If the Reagan administration can't be persuaded of the need for these funds on humanitarian grounds, or if it doesn't believe that excessive population growth sabotages economic development in the Third World, it at least should pay attention to the way in which the population explosion leads to political instability in the Third World, which, in turn, creates security problems for the United States.

According to sources at the Population Institute of Washington, a still-classified Central Intelligence Agency report lists many global flash points that could lead to wars in this century—wars that have their roots in the unrestrained growth of population.

For example, the CIA report, titled "Population, Resources & Politics in the Third World: The Long View," predicts that Mexican-U.S. relations may be the most complex problem that the United States faces at the turn of the century because of migrant traffic across the border, and water and pollution problems.

The CIA says that the population explosion also may have enough of an impact on Turkey to destabilize NATO; lead Honduras and El Salvador into war; cause Vietnam to expand into underpopulated Laos and Kampuchia, perhaps bringing the Soviets and China to the brink of war; and create a variety of problems for Middle East allies of the United States, notably Israel and Egypt. (Egypt, Mexico, El Salvador and Vietnam are four countries listed as "outgrowing" their borders.)

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